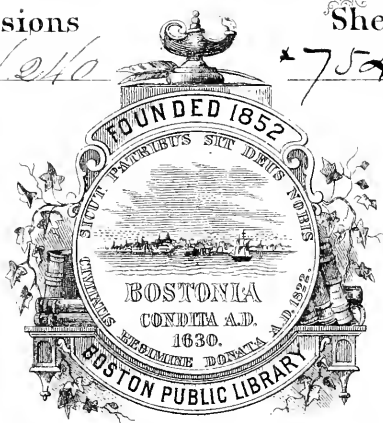


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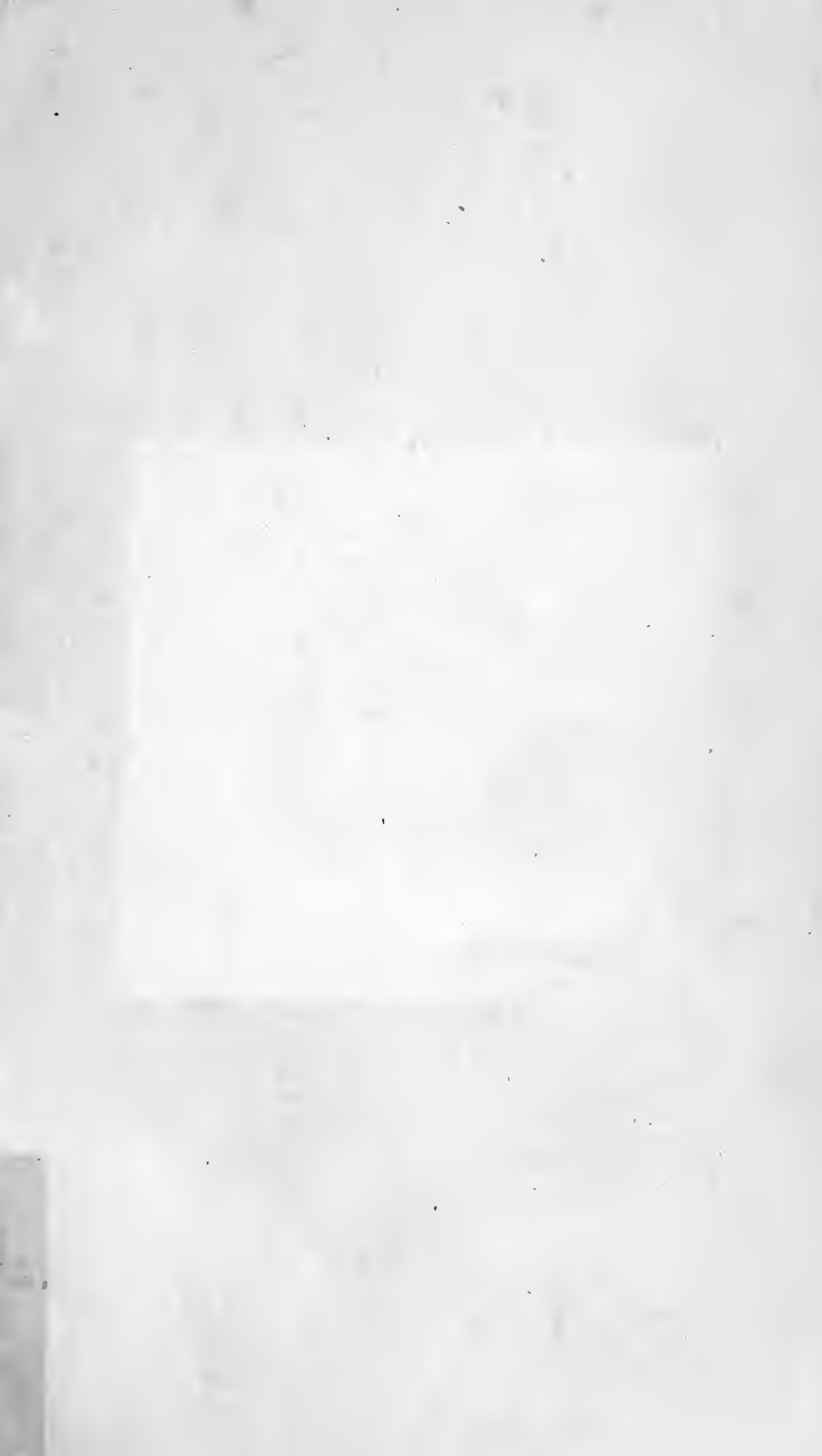
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RESULT

OF AN

ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCIL,

CONVENED IN THE

VESTRY OF THE HOWARD ST. CHURCH, SALEM,

ON

Wednesday, July 27, 1831.

BOSTON:

PRINTED BY PEIRCE AND PARKER.

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1831.

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R E S U L T .

An Ecclesiastical Council was convened in the Vestry of the Howard Street Church in Salem, on Wednesday, July 27, 1831, by letters missive from said Howard Street Church, "to look into, settle, and adjust, by their advice, all subject-matters of difficulties in the church in consequence of the course of proceedings relative to brethren Isaac P. Foster and John Brooks." The following churches were represented in the council, by their pastors and delegates, viz :—

Greene Street Church in Boston,	{	REV. WILLIAM JENKS, <i>Pastor</i> ,
	{	BR. RUFUS DANFORTH, <i>Delegate</i> .
Bowdoin Street Church, Boston,	{	REV. LYMAN BEECHER, <i>Pastor</i> ,
	{	BR. GEORGE E. HEAD, <i>Delegate</i>
First Church in Charlestown,	{	REV. WARREN FAY, <i>Pastor</i> ,
	{	DEA. AMOS TUFTS, <i>Delegate</i> .
Old South Church in Boston,	{	REV. BENJ. B. WISNER, <i>Pastor</i> ,
	{	BR. CHAS. STODDARD, <i>Delegate</i> .

The Council was organized by choosing the Rev. WARREN FAY, Moderator, Rev. B. B. WISNER, Scribe, and Mr. GEORGE E. HEAD, Assistant Scribe. The Moderator then led in prayer. The record of the proceedings of the church, "relative to brethren Isaac P. Foster and John Brooks" was read, beginning at page 66 and ending at page 130, of the volume of the records of the church, which begins with a record of the meeting of the church held Feb. 12, 1828. The following documents were also read, viz. "A statement explanatory of the representation made by the pastor, at the meeting of the church on the 5th of April, 1831;" "A reply to said statement by Br. Isaac P. Foster, read at the church Meeting on Tuesday evening, May 3;" "An additional explanation made by the pastor in reply to the communication by Br. Isaac P. Foster, on the explanatory statement to the church, April 19;" and "A review of this

case presented by the pastor, June 21, 1831." The above named documents were directed, by a vote of the church passed June 23, 1831, to be put on file, if it were found "practicable to obtain copies" of the same. The printed rules and regulations of the Howard Street Church, which had been several times referred to in the Record, were also read.

The Rev. Mr. Williams, in behalf of himself and fifteen members of the church* who had voted against the act of the majority in calling this council, offered a certain paper. Members in the majority objected to the introduction of the paper. Mr. Williams was then called upon to state the object of the paper, which he did. Reasons were then stated for and against its introduction. The council decided that the paper should be read, and it was read accordingly. Members of the majority having stated that they wished to reply to said communication, the council, to give them opportunity so to do, adjourned till 8 o'clock, to-morrow morning.

THURSDAY MORNING, JULY 28, 1831. The Council met agreeably to adjournment. Mr. Daniel Millet, a member of the Howard Street Church, stated, that at a meeting of said church, held this morning, himself and Mr. William Abbot were appointed a committee "to represent the church before the council." The committee then proceeded to introduce testimony to prove incorrectness in the records of the church, in relation to the subject of the Remonstrance presented to the church by certain members on the 9th of June, 1831. Several other points, and evidence in regard to them, were also presented by the committee of the church to the council, with which the time of the council was occupied, with necessary intervals of adjournments, till the afternoon of Thursday.

* In order to correspond with the facts, it should read, *Eleven of whom voted against the act, &c.* By order of the Church.

Mr. Williams, in behalf of himself, and the minority of the church, then proceeded to offer testimony on the several points presented by the committee of the church, which occupied the council till late in the evening.—At a meeting on Friday morning the council heard remarks and arguments on the whole case from the committee of the church and from the Rev. Mr. Williams, and then proceeded to frame their Result which is as follows :—

R E S U L T .

This Council, having been called by ‘a vote of the church, at a regular meeting,’ “to look into, settle and adjust, by their advice, all subject-matters of difficulties in the church in consequence of the course of proceedings relative to brethren Isaac P. Foster and John Brooks,” consider themselves not a mutual, nor an *exparte* council, but a council called by the church for consultation and advice ; (Cambridge Platform, Chap. 15, Sec. 2.—Mather’s Disquisition on Ecclesiastical Councils, page 43.) and therefore regularly called, and duly authorized to examine into, and pronounce upon, the matters presented in the letters missive, according to the directions of Scripture and the usages of the congregational churches. And they have been gratified that the regularity of their call, and their right to examine into and pronounce upon the matters brought before them, have not been called in question, but acquiesced in by both the parties in the unhappy contentions that have existed in this church.

The questions and points submitted to the council, and upon which the council deem it important that they should pronounce an opinion, will now be noticed in their order.

I. *Will this council examine into, and pronounce upon, the guilt or innocence of brethren Isaac P. Foster and John Brooks, in relation to the charges preferred against them in the complaint submitted to the church May 17,*

1831?—This question, the council have been and are fully satisfied, should be answered in the *negative*, inasmuch as the points of the guilt or innocence of brethren Foster and Brooks in relation to the aforesaid charges, has never been passed upon in the church, and is, therefore, not included in the “course of proceedings” presented to this council for examination by the letters missive.

In relation to the general subjects referred to in this question, the council will add, that, if there has been, on the part of brethren Foster and Brooks, (as would seem to be implied in the charges that were preferred against them,) or in any other members of this church, a misguided and indiscreet zeal, tending to questions engendering strife,—to innovations upon the usual practice and order of the church, and rising up to an interference with what belongs to the pastoral office, constituting them in the sense of the Bible, busybodies in other men’s matters, self-righteous, self-willed, censorious, and swayed by a false and intemperate zeal instead of the meekness and gentleness of Christ, by which they become murmurers and complainers, speaking evil of the pastor whom Christ has made a ruler in the church, in a manner tending to wound his feelings, or to provoke his spirit, or impair his reputation, or shake the confidence of the church in his discretion and fidelity, or embarrass his usefulness by censuring or opposing his administrations, and in this way leading to debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults,—without deciding whether such a course of conduct as above described has taken place—we do not hesitate to say, that it constitutes an amount of miscellaneous and undefined criminality, surpassed in provocation and mischief by no species of crime which can infest the church. Order is heaven’s first and eternal law;—and wherever intelligent beings associate, there, by heaven’s appointment, *law*, and rulers for its administration, and the

injunction of respect and subordination, exist; the force of which even Michael felt, when, instead of a railing accusation, he said to the great archangel ruined, "The Lord rebuke thee." The attempt of the brotherhood in some churches, eighty years ago, to strip the ministerial office of the attributes and influence in the church with which Jesus Christ has clothed it, though occasioned often by the wicked opposition of pastors to revivals of religion, produced irregularities, disorder, and convulsions, from which the churches have not, in all respects, recovered, to this day;—an example which needs no repetition to deepen the impression of its great evil, and to unite all the churches and all the pastors to watch and pray against it. In respect to clerical influence, it is, and can be, in our land, only that which belongs to the pastoral office by divine appointment, and which results from piety, talents, discretion, fidelity, and success in the work of the Lord, and which can be prevented but by the cessation of ministerial qualification. Now, to make that influence which is due to office, and which is earned by fidelity, the occasion of jealousies and whisperings, is to side with infidels, and to repeat the crime of Korah and his company.

But, on the other hand, if any symptoms of such disorder should manifest themselves in a small number of the brotherhood in any particular church, we are persuaded that it is with us, in this region, rather a limited affection than a threatening epidemic, and admits of, and demands to be treated by, mild, instead of severe, remedies. Brethren of this description, it may be hoped, are really pious, and though the excess of zeal consists, usually, in an ardent natural temperament, rather than in superior attainments in grace, and is mingled, often, with no small degree of self-complacency, self-confidence, spiritual pride, and, when resisted, of asperity and self-will, yet, in no instance, do we apprehend its dangerous tendencies can be so well

averted by direct resistance, and the severity of discipline, as by the exhibition of kindness and confidence, and, so far as is practicable, by co-operation;—in this manner, giving to it both vent and a safe direction. Few brethren, at the present day, have so much zeal, as may not easily be worked off in very safe and useful labors, by the kind direction of pastoral wisdom: while we doubt not, that, in this day of rising action and glory, a very little stream obstructed, may swell to a torrent of resistless desolation, which, duly guided, might have fertilized the region through which it safely passed. The present state of the world demands a vast increase, both of interest and action, and for a minister, regardless of the signs of the times, to meet the indications of exuberant zeal with suspicion, resistance, and rebuke, is to run the risk of opposing what is, or may easily be made to be, useful; and to become himself, by indiscretion, the occasion of the evils of which he complains.

There is employment enough demanded, to carry on the great effort to evangelize the world, to occupy the hearts and hands of all;—only let things be done decently and in order, with mutual confidence and affection, and consultation between the pastors and members of the churches, and all will be well. The reproach of barrenness and jealousy, alienation and strife, will be past; and the church, in her moral glory, will rise upon the world, “clear as the sun, fair as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners.”

II. *Were the complaints, conceived by the pastor and certain members of the church, to lie against brethren Foster and Brooks, and intended to have been embodied in the complaint submitted to the church May 17, 1831, regularly brought before the church?*—This question the council are satisfied must be answered in the *negative* for the following general reasons:

1. The pastor, it seems, regarding the two brethren just named as attempting to promote in the church opinions and practices of injurious and dangerous tendency, and to produce dissatisfaction with the minister, and as alleging the existence of an extensive dissatisfaction,—without any previous steps with these brethren, preferred a request to the church for dismissal, with the design of ascertaining the state of the church in regard to the particulars just named. This was, in the view of the council, irregular and indiscreet, being calculated to promote difficulty and division in the church, far more than to accomplish any good result.

2. The complaints regarded by the pastor as lying against brethren Foster and Brooks were brought by him before the church, without his having previously taken any private steps with those brethren to reclaim them, and to remove the difficulties which he regarded as existing between himself and those brethren. This the council deem to have been irregular. And to sustain this opinion, the council do not deem it necessary to go into a minute and labored examination of the difference between private and public offences, and the course of proceeding to be adopted in regard to each. If the right does exist to bring a public offence, at once, before the church, without previous steps of a private character, (on which point the council do not express an opinion,) the existence of this right does not supercede the expediency, and the duty, in many cases, of taking those previous steps. Such expediency and duty in the judgment of the council, would exist in reference to very many cases which are, according to the definitions usually given, public offences. The case now under examination, should it be considered a public offence, would have been, in the opinion of this council, clearly of this class. There was nothing that the council have learned, to supercede the expediency of taking such previous steps. That course, the council are satisfied,

would have been far more likely to have issued in a removal of the difficulties and the promotion of the peace and edification of the church: and, if so, it was duty to have taken that course, and the opposite one should not have been taken.—But,

3. The offence, if one had been committed, by brethren Foster and Brooks, was, in the judgment of the Council, a private offence. The rules of this Church define a private offence to be “that which is either personal in its nature, or which is known only to a very few individuals.” The expression, “which is known only to a very few individuals,” must mean the commission of which was witnessed by only a few individuals. Now the acts of offence alleged against brethren Foster and Brooks, in the statement of the pastor to the Church, April 19th, 1831, so far as they were specific and definite and therefore capable of being examined and decided upon, were, mainly if not entirely, acts of theirs toward the pastor, “*personal* in their nature,” or remarks concerning the pastor made to individuals. If these remarks were improper and unchristian, it was the duty of those who heard them to have dealt privately with the brethren who made them in regard to them. And if they neglected to do this, and contrary to their duty in such cases, reported them to the pastor, he should have reminded them of their duty, and used his influence with them to induce them to perform it. And if this did not check the evil, and remove it, the offence having been, at its commission, “known only to a few,” the pastor should have gone privately to the offending brethren, and told them, affectionately and faithfully, of their fault, and then endeavored to bring them to repentance and reformation. And, if the attempt failed, then to have renewed it, taking with him one or two more. And, then, if all these efforts had unhappily failed, and duty to those brethren and to the cause of Christ required it, it would have

been proper to have told the matter to the Church. The council have no doubts, that these are the principles of the Gospel in regard to such cases, and, as they believe, the principles intended to have been embodied in the Rules of this Church ; and no language can express too strongly the importance of a faithful adherence to them by pastors and brethren in discharging their duties to one another and to the whole Church.

The complaints supposed by the pastor to lie against brethren Foster and Brooks having been, in the judgment of the council, thus irregularly brought before the church, all subsequent proceedings in what was regarded the direct prosecution of those complaints, were, of course, irregular and void. The council, therefore, do not deem it necessary to pronounce, specifically, upon the regularity of the citation, and, whether brethren Foster and Brooks did or did not refuse to come to trial.

III. *The third prominent subject presented for the consideration and judgment of the council related to the remonstrance presented to the church, June 9th, 1831.*

On this subject it has been alleged, on the one side, that the pastor *decided* that the presentation of this remonstrance deprived those who had signed it, of the rights and privilege of acting further in relation to the discipline of brethren Foster and Brooks, with which, it was supposed, the church were then to proceed. That he so *decided*, the pastor does not admit, and says, he only stated what he supposed to be the intention of those who had signed the remonstrance, in presenting it to the church. Much testimony, written and oral, was presented on this point. After deliberately and candidly weighing it, the council are satisfied that the statement made by the pastor, in the circumstances in which it was made, should be regarded as an official decision of the effect of the remonstrance on the right and privilege of those who had presented it to

take part in the future proceedings. Such a decision was undoubtedly erroneous ; a remonstrance being but a written statement of reasons why those who have signed it think the proceedings going forward should be arrested, presented with a view of arresting them, but depriving those who present it of no right or privilege which they would have had, had they not presented such a paper. If the remonstrance does not have the effect hoped for by those who signed it, and they refuse to participate in the subsequent proceedings, that refusal is not acting out what was implied in the remonstrance, but is an independent step, grounded on the failure of the remonstrance to accomplish what was desired, and which may or may not be taken, notwithstanding their remonstrance, by those who have presented it, at their option. But was the remark made by the pastor upon the presentation of the remonstrance, to be regarded as having been a statement only of what he supposed to be the effect it was designed to have by those who had presented it, it appears to have been erroneous in point of fact, as it seems, on the whole, to be evident to the council that they had no such design. And had it been correct in point of fact, the pastor should have told them that they had wholly mistaken the influence of a remonstrance, and could not, in this easy and summary way, throw off responsibility in relation to the business of the church. Had any of them, after this, refused to take part in the proceedings, that would have been another act, not involved in signing and presenting the remonstrance, but grounded upon the remonstrance having failed to arrest the proceedings ; which refusal might have been, on their part, a serious dereliction of duty.

IV. It is submitted to the council *whether it was regular and proper for the non-remonstrants constituting, as they did, a minority of the church, "to withdraw from brethren I. P. Foster and John Brooks, watch and care,*

and fellowship, as they voted to do, June 23, 1831, on the alleged ground of contumacy in refusing to submit to the discipline of this church." Whether it was regular and proper for the non-remonstrants, constituting as they did, a minority of the church, to pass such an act, the council need not decide. Had the whole church been present and acting, and all previous proceedings been regular, it would, in the judgment of this council, have been irregular and improper, in the other circumstances then existing, to have passed such an act. If the brethren accused refuse to come to trial, whether absent or present, the church ought to have proceeded to try them. So, it seems to us, reason and common sense would decide; and such we believe is the practice of all well regulated churches. (See Form of Government and Discipline of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, Book II. chap. 4, Sect. 13, 15.)

The commencement and issue of what is styled, the trial of brethren I. P. Foster and J. Brooks, having been thus irregular and improper, the whole proceeding, in the judgment of this council, is null and void: and these brethren are now, and are to be regarded as, members in regular standing in this church, as they were before these proceedings commenced.

These are the points presented for the consideration of the council, on which they deem it important to pronounce an opinion.

The council would add, that, in their view, there has been a serious fault in all the proceedings that have come under their review, in making so much of technicalities and points of order. A Congregational church, this council must think, will rarely proceed harmoniously, for any great length of time, under such an administration. The rule of Christ's house is, *not*, let every thing be done with technical accuracy, according to minute and extended

rules, but, "let all things be done unto edifying." "Follow after the things that make for peace, and things whereby one may edify another." How different would have been the state of things in this church, if less, much less attention had been given to technicalities and supposed rules of procedure, and more to the cultivation of a spirit of forbearance, and forgiveness, and love.

In attending to this painful case, the council cannot perceive any necessity for the great evils which have come upon this church, which have not been occasioned by a wrong state of feeling, and irregular proceedings. And after all which is passed, they perceived, now, no sufficient cause to institute a course of public discipline, until the interposition of kind and conciliatory measures has been tried—nor any impediment to their entire success, which must not arise from the pertinacious indulgence of an exceedingly sinful state of feeling on all sides. We are persuaded that the day approaches, and has even now come, when the exhibition in churches of anger and strife, and evil speaking and obstinacy, will be restrained by a sense of shame in the presence of an over powering frown of a holy public sentiment,—as well as by the utter inconsistency of such exhibitions with the very existence of Christian character, amid the increasing light and glories of the present day.

The council make no claim to authority. It knows itself to be only brotherly and advisory. Nor does it assume to itself the attributes of an unerring judgment. Our only pretensions to confidence are, some past experience, and such assistance from above, as, having been sincerely sought, we may humbly hope, has, according to promise, been afforded. But on these grounds, and since the church have voluntarily called us to aid them by our advice; and the parties concerned having acquiesced in our hearing the case; and as we have, for so long a time with-

drawn ourselves from high pastoral and public duties at home ; and have, with so much patience and exhausting attention, given our best consideration to the subject ;—we do feel that, either all pretensions to church fellowship in asking and giving council should be abandoned, or the honest and prayerful advice of impartial friends be entitled to solemn and practical consideration.

And to us it appears, that this dictate of Christian propriety is enforced, at this time, by the voice of God's gracious providence, which is speaking without and around this church, and producing results in such contrast to the language and feelings and employments which are taking place within : and, constrained by conscience and the ties of brotherhood, we do beseech the pastor and every member of this church to cease from strife, and turn from mutual accusation and reproaches to mutual confessions to God of their sins against him, and one another, and his blessed cause.—In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and of his surrounding churches, we beseech you brethren to put out this fire, and to remove from among us this moral nuisance ; and to return to your former relations of peace and brotherly love.—If this favorable issue cannot be achieved, it is the united opinion of this council, that those who cannot dwell together in peace, had better separate. But, brethren, if you will consider the histories of eternity, which, in behalf of hundreds, may be reversed by these continued contentions, and be written as the histories of sin and woe, which might have been histories of glory, and honor, and immortality ; if you consider how much you have sinned against God to be forgiven—how soon the hand of time will throw into littleness all which your passions now amplify ; and how soon the retrospect on the bed of death will call forth sorrow, and confession, and prayers for pardon,—and how soon, if washed from your sins, you will meet reconciled above to admire the patience that bore

with you, and the mercy that forgave you, and the grace that made you meet for heaven :—if these solemn considerations are duly impressed upon your minds, we cannot doubt that our advice will be regarded as the smiting of the righteous, which, though painful, shall not wound, but be an excellent oil.

May God preserve you, beloved brethren,—your pastor and yourselves ; and take from you the cup of wormwood and gall, of which, for so long a time you have drunk so deeply, and put into your hand the cup of his consolations, which are neither few nor small.

JULY 29, 1831. In Council,—VOTED, *unanimously*, that the above be approved and adopted as the minutes and results of this Council.—

WARREN FAY, *Moderator*.

B. B. WISNER, *Scribe*.

GEORGE E. HEAD, *Assistant Scribe*.

A true copy of the minutes and result of the Council.

Attest.

B. B. WISNER, *Scribe*.

Boston, August 3, 1831.



